

Close-Up: Black Film and Black Visual Culture

In a (Not So) Silent Way: Listening Past Black
Visuality in *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*

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Abstract

This article considers William Greaves’s singular cinematic experiment Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One (1968) in light of the common expectation that blackness is a readily available visual fact. A seemingly oblique engagement with blackness is foundational to the film’s overarching strategies of misdirection and promotes particular resonances between race and sound. Following, I explore the problematic nature of black visuality and critique the notion that Symbio lacks any perspicuous engagement with race. Since the visual is clearly the dominant mode of engagement with blackness, Symbio elides this black visuality by figuring blackness differently; it sounds, sings, and performs blackness instead of visualizing it. Music (Miles Davis’s In a Silent Way), sound (primarily noise), and performance (particularly an oppositional vernacular performativity in line with what W. T. Lhamon calls “optic black”) rise to the fore. Ultimately, the engagement with sonic relations opens race to audiovisual practices of improvisation, jazz, noise, and remixing. Blackness thus emerges as performative, disruptive, relational, noisy, improvised, and available for reappropriation and remixing.

Is silence simply a matter of not playing?

—JOHN MOWITT, *SOUNDS: THE AMBIENT HUMANITIES*¹

I always listen to what I can leave out.

—MILES DAVIS

But now . . . let me hear your . . . let me hear the sound.

—WILLIAM GREAVES, *SYMBIOPSYCHOTAXIPLASM*

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Improvisation, in its divergence from the given, frequently will not allow us not to hear noise, the creaking of categorization, the noise categorization suppresses and the noise, not admitting doing so, it makes.

—NATHANIEL MACKEY, *PARACRITICAL HINGE*²

Music in its own right is frequently considered generative and connective. Under such terms, music is a social force with the power to foster relations among people and groups and to spur social and political change. Going further, it is often argued that jazz itself is neither music nor genre but rather a critical and social practice—even a mode of being—that opens dialogue and, as A. J. Heble writes, “reinvigorates public life” and “builds purposeful communities of interest and involvement.”³ Jazz may in fact be particularly good at creating new forms of relation due to its group improvisatory nature and its emphasis on collective listening and coextension, if not cooperation.⁴ When jazz happens, it is sometimes dissonant, noisy, and even disorganized—none of which are necessarily undesirable traits. The refusal of standardized form, melody, and harmony has flourished in jazz since Monk, Miles, and 1960s free music, but the potential for chaos, instability, and irreverence exists wherever groups of people spontaneously create anything. At times proximate with jazz but irreducible to it, blackness itself can be a disruptive, performative, and critical intervention—a noisy and fecund ground rather than a sociological inevitability or a priori visual fact.⁵ Moreover, there is also no doubt that jazz is black, though not exclusively so. In the interest of such issues, I offer *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (dir. William Greaves, 1968), which, among other things, is a film that troubles the visual and discursive predicates of blackness while engaging sonic relations in ways that open both sound and race to audiovisual practices of improvisation, jazz, noise, and even remixing.⁶

In order to parse these issues, it is necessary to listen, just as improvising ensembles must listen. To listen is not to observe or perceive so much as it is to engage in a conversation; when we listen, we often involve ourselves in a relation with distinct elements of reciprocity. To listen is sometimes to diminish the primacy of vision, but it is also to augment vision. Thus, it is possible to hear (and see, more clearly) blackness as performative, as disruptive, as relational, as noisy, as improvised, as available for reappropriation and remixing. In other words, *Symbio* distresses visuality, even as it acknowledges that the fictive essentialisms of race emerge in large part through processes of looking. The film does not ignore the objectifying processes of racialization through visuality, but as with everything in this singular work the arguments are presented in ways both labyrinthine and enigmatic—easily seen, but usually overlooked or unheard.⁷ What follows is a consideration of *Symbio* in light of the common expectation that blackness is a readily

available visual fact. I argue here that a seemingly oblique or absent engagement with blackness is foundational to the film's overarching strategies of misdirection and leads to explicit epistemological and ontological explorations of race made through sound. This approach allows me to explore the problematic nature of black visibility, but it also provides an opportunity to explore the idea that *Symbio* lacks any perspicuous engagement with race, a common claim in critical discourses surrounding the film.⁸ The film despoils essentially every standard of normative filmmaking practice and concomitantly destabilizes a priori blackness alongside a variety of other categorical inadequacies. Ultimately, since the visual is clearly the dominant contemporary mode of engagement with blackness, *Symbio* elides this black visibility by figuring blackness differently; it sounds, sings, and performs blackness instead of strictly visualizing it.

Historically, one of the more consequential areas in which the visual is predominant is race. Throughout its rather short history, race has been defined principally by both subjective judgments of what humans look like—and therefore how they might be categorized—and by the authority to look. Regarding the latter, Nicholas Mirzoeff argues that “visuality,” which he defines as “the exclusive claim to be able to look,” is “part of how the ‘West’ historicizes and distinguishes itself from its others.”⁹ Regarding the former, W. J. T. Mitchell argues, in his recent provocative formulation of race as “medium,” that race is not exclusively visual “but engages all the senses and signs that make human cognition, and especially *recognition*, possible.”¹⁰ In contradistinction to the scopic capture enacted by black visibility, many black critical theorists offer sound as a productive ground for black expressivity, struggle, and resistance. This critical tradition engages black sound and music as “expressive alternatives” to vision.¹¹ Lindon Barrett's important theorization of the “singing voice” versus the “signing voice,” or the “racialized opposition” present in “the reciprocal interests of the scopic and the phonic [as] indices of unequal cultural positions and resources,” is emblematic of such thinking.¹² Paul Gilroy's arguments are also pivotal. He argues that music, as an organized subset of sound, forms a principal element of the unique expressive culture of the black Atlantic. The system of chattel slavery predicated on epidermality indelibly marked post-slavery black culture, Gilroy argues, concluding that a performative, embodied emphasis on orality and the musical are necessary black-cultural counterbalances to visual apparatuses.¹³ This theoretical trajectory is a significant influence on my argument, yet, to insist upon the visual as always racially circumscribing—to reduce vision to visibility—is to risk foreclosing the visual field to any challenge from black subjectivities.¹⁴ Thus, I ask the following: How can sound be used to dislodge the sedimented layers of racial discourses that work to define and restrict subjects coded as black? How do some cultural productions,

like *Symbio*, use sound, image, and performance to intervene in racial epistememes? Ultimately, varieties of sound—musical, vocal, noisy, silent, recombinant, aleatory, environmental, improvisational—and practices of sounding work to trouble the visual and discursive regimes that circulate and attach blackness to subjects. While these sounds and sonic techniques are often connected to or partially embedded within visual fields, I argue that the sonic may nevertheless arouse dissonance, consonance, or harmony with the visual in matters of race; moreover, this sonic troubling of racist scopic regimes is an oft-overlooked but paradoxically highly conspicuous process deployed by objects such as *Symbio*.

Introduction and Synopsis

The film begins with a noise.¹⁵ The director hired a heterogeneous crew—diverse in gender, ethnicity, and nationality—to shoot a film in Central Park. The fiction film they are ostensibly shooting, *Over the Cliff*, consists chiefly of a melodramatic argument between a wife and husband with serious relationship issues. Various actors portray the couple, but Patricia Ree Gilbert and Don Fellows are the most prominent pair in *Symbio*. The wife, Alice, accuses the husband, Freddie, of being closeted and having multiple gay affairs. Freddie argues that Alice has sexual hang-ups and is projecting. Alice is increasingly fed up with Freddie's cheating and wants to have a baby, citing the trauma caused by numerous abortions performed at his behest.¹⁶ That is the extent of the fictional *mise en abyme*, but the real substance of the film is found outside the lovers' quarrel.

Over the Cliff is largely a ruse designed to rile up the actors and crew in the interest of exploring human relationships, group dynamics, authority, and so on. The crew are tasked with keeping three sets of cameras and portable sound recording equipment going at once, essentially forming three units: one filming the fiction scenes, the next filming that crew in a sort of behind-the-scenes fashion, and the third filming the first and second crews, along with anything else that might happen around the park. Greaves sometimes operated yet another camera himself, leading to exponential takes on many scenes, which the film often represents using split screen. The melodrama has only the barest skeleton of a script, and the crew is forced to watch multiple actors repeat the same scenes endlessly. As dozens of hours of footage pile up and the film fails to take shape, cast and crew grow increasingly frustrated with what they see as a pointless production and Greaves's variously haughty and hapless incompetence. These frustrations ultimately lead to a mutiny or palace revolt wherein the crew appropriate several rolls of film and retire to an indoor location to smoke and gripe thoughtfully about Greaves and his performance.

It seems that this is precisely how the director wants it, and the revolt scenes are some of the film's most reflexive moments. During this happening, one of the leaders of the production, Bob Rosen, turns to the camera to remark, "We may all be acting, and the director may be right outside the door right now." The indeterminacy and doubt engendered in such scenes are crucial to the film's overarching strategies. In any case, the crew is instructed to keep rolling at all costs, so the footage captures the accidents of the everyday: passersby, police, random drunks, malfunctioning equipment, and internecine strife. In a fortuitous accident, a penultimate moment of reflexivity occurs when a homeless man, Victor, wanders into the production. He has a vague French accent, carries his shoes and clothes slung over his shoulder, and rants colorfully to the crew while panhandling. He is a memorable figure, injecting a necessarily overt bit of class-consciousness into the film, and the director and crew are stunned to find that Victor and many others live in the bushes of Central Park.¹⁷ Indeed, his commentary could hardly be more apt if it were scripted: "A movie? Who's moving whom?" he wonders.

This sort of polyphony—in the musical sense as well as the Bakhtinian sense of the term—and cacophony make *Symbio* highly complex and ripe with meaning, allowing the form to match the complexity of the film's concerns.¹⁸ Take, for example, the multiple uses of split screen (fig. 1). This set of images features a shot of the production crew, as it is bookended by both shot and reverse-shot simultaneously. The audio comes from multiple



Figure 1. Use of split screen in *Symbio*.

microphones at once. We thus hear the actors working their lines as well as various conversations among the crew, who express their frustration with errors and mislaid equipment. This diversity of perspectives creates confusion, or even cacophony, and a sort of complex interplay among the various parts of the film (mise en abyme, documentary, behind-the-scenes footage, public location footage) that rewards repeated viewings, just as jazz often demands close listening. The film opens as many cinematic givens as possible to reinterpretation and rearrangement, if not complete ruin: it has no real script, the director feigns incompetence, multiple actors play the same characters, endless hours of footage are shot by three simultaneous crews, the cast and crew mutiny, the film only begins to make sense during editing, and so on. In other words, both industry-standard production practices and popular expectations of what a film should be are largely obliterated here, but there is a granular retention of the basics—acting, filming, editing—that is reconfigured into a new whole, all founded on improvisational dynamism, with a heavy and explicitly acknowledged debt to jazz. Indeed, Greaves always referred to the film as “cinematic jazz.”¹⁹ Jazz, however, can mean myriad different things.

Jazz, Improvisation, Noise, and Remixing

Here, jazz is specifically Miles Davis’s *In a Silent Way*, which the film foregrounds as both a score and a formal, if not ontological, model. *Symbio* is obviously improvisational, but it engages *In a Silent Way*’s montagic improvisational jazz expressly to focalize the potential interventions of improvisational praxis itself.²⁰ Davis’s music is a suggestive choice, as both the film and the album are composed of improvisation recorded from multiple vantages, heavily edited, and later reconstructed. *In a Silent Way* and the subsequent album *Bitches Brew* were somewhat infamously spliced together out of numerous free-form jam sessions loosely led by Miles, who provided rough ideas for his world-class combos to improvise upon, with the various takes then mixed together into a whole by producer Teo Macero. This is dangerously close to contemporary remixing practice and remains largely outside most jazz work. Not coincidentally, *Symbio* is put together in much the same way.²¹ In short, the film and its music are nearly ontologically identical in their status as collective improvisation, remixed. Notably, both *Symbio* and *In a Silent Way* accentuate the power of marginally directed group improvisation that is compiled and collated in a search for meaning.²² In a sense, these two pioneering objects roughly envision and then create their own counter-archives, which may then be repeatedly scoured and reconfigured in enduring processual attempts to make meaning. The film, like the music,

is composed of innumerable takes, and it makes meaning both during and after the act through editing. This is meaning as improvisational relation, but it is also meaning remixed.

Following this complex set of formal practices is the film's nearly unpronounceable title. The word "symbiotaxiplasm," without the "psycho," reflects Greaves's eclectic inspirations, including the work of Arthur F. Bentley, a contemporary of John Dewey who attempted to formulate a theory of the social that included micro-interactions among the *socius*, groups, and surrounding materiality. Greaves draws on Bentley's "symbiotaxiplasm," which in turn drew upon turn-of-the-century physiologist Michael A. Lane's "symbiotaxis."²³ The "psycho" represents Greaves's interest in psychoanalysis and human psychological states. Ultimately, Greaves's experiment was an attempt to set up and record, before finally editing down and analyzing, the incredible complexity of human's interactions with one another and the surrounding environment. This interactivity—the semi-scripted extemporization of the actors and the quotidian relations among the crew and between the crew and park patrons—is foundationally improvisational. Thus, improvisation forms the raw material of the film and even extends into the postproduction process of editing, where Greaves cuts and mixes the footage together in whatever ways feel right to him at the time—thus, multiple takes. It is this ontological modality of edited group improvisation, so rarely employed in most other filmmaking, that helps get to some of the difficult answers in the film.²⁴ As Nathaniel Mackey has said, improvisation insists "that the given is only the beginning, that arrangements as we find them are subject to change, rearrangement."²⁵ For jazz musicians, as for the trained actors and film crew Greaves hired, improvisation is not necessarily a fracas entered into without preparation—which is not to say that all improvisation, especially of the vital quotidian sort, requires education.²⁶ Careful study and refined skills are focalized during improvisation, especially in jazz playing. In improvisation, something unique emerges out of a shared performative temporality, something that precedes normative judgments and that could not be composed in advance. As it is in jazz, so it is in this film. *Symbio* understands improvisation as both the potential for the creation of the new and the equally powerful potential for everything to fall apart, for chaos to reign. This does not necessarily imply that order is normative, but rather that large groups being spontaneous together always holds the potential for a variety of responses, many of which are not necessarily harmonious. In short, improvisation can be very noisy, and varying subjectivities, by definition, bring difference to the process and constantly modulate the outcomes, regardless of the predetermined boundaries and idealized expectations. If there is a leader, the leader's expectations and boundaries are, as a matter of practice, met, strained, exceeded, or torpedoed by the improvisational practice.

In this way, the improvisational is sometimes the noisy and is often the unexpected—or even and especially the response to the unexpected—and the noisy is also the political, and it is also the black.²⁷

Prior critical discourse tends to emphasize the contextual importance of Greaves as a black auteur at a time where there were so few; in other words, the outside of the film impinges on its inside. This is by no means a controversial or even questionable stance to take as a critic: the antiblackness that (con)founds Western modernity makes Greaves and his work all the more important, but it proves the point: in its initiatory context, its critical-historical reception, and the present milieu, Greaves's blackness is remarkable even when it remains unremarked upon, yet the fact of his blackness foisted upon him neither requires nor prohibits that his art be black. Still, I believe that the film engages blackness in highly original, oblique (yet noisy) fashion, just as it does nearly everything else.

Nevertheless, a recent spate of scholarship attempts to parse why race is seemingly absent from *Symbio* when it is an overriding concern of most of Greaves's other films.²⁸ The overt racial politics of Greaves's previous work are of deep significance here: take, for example, a contemporaneous two-page *New York Times* piece wherein Greaves referred to himself as "Furious Black" and advocated a black social and mediatic revolution in a powerfully written and strident denunciation of structural and ideological antiblack racism.²⁹ To say nothing of strong denunciations regarding the "obligations" of black artists to produce black art, where is Greaves's strident blackness in *Symbio*? Again, I suggest that it is in the sound, in the improvisation, in the performance, in the jazz, in the oppositionality, and in the noise. Not incidentally, there is a precedent here in Miles, who famously used flubbed notes, noises, and so-called non-musical sounds throughout his career, a fact that a number of critics have cited as his tragic flaw. Yet, other writers like David Ake and Ted Gioia argue that Miles Davis's music engages an "aesthetics of imperfection" that not only incorporates mistakes, voices, flubbed notes, and noises, but in so doing, returns an awareness of the body to jazz recordings.³⁰ Sometimes, sounds are better than words; noises are better than speech, and the oblique is precisely the point. Put differently, blackness is regularly sonic, noisy, and performative, and is very much in line with the dynamic that Greaves endeavors to create in *Symbio*, from the film's title to its very last image and sounds.

Indeed blackness, like so many other things in the film, is subjected to misdirection rather than absence. Blackness is absent here only as an aporia constructed in part by visual regimes that configure it as a lack. In this sense, blackness is always absent, even when it is present, which is a key point the film makes through a voice that withholds visual signification and direct address of blackness in favor of more subtle cues that are easily

detected—with the right ear. Greaves did not simply abandon his passionate engagement with racial politics, but it would make no sense, in a film that goes to great pains to refuse the stentorian announcement of anything, to proclaim blackness in starkly literal terms. A work as singular and enigmatic and complex as *Symbio* must offer a singular and enigmatic and complicated approach to blackness. *Symbio* does not straightforwardly address race through a frontal turn toward the camera by the famously “furious Black” director. Instead, the film refracts race, breaking off pieces and sending them flying; it does this for two reasons: because the film is deliberately unobvious about most things and because race itself is never straightforward. Sometimes, to turn away says more than speaking out. Put differently, when looking relations are constructed in such a way as to code subjects as raced, the ontological resistance of those subjects is denied or broken down.³¹ The film presumes an audience that perceives race through an uncritically habituated visuality. Thus, the film need not loudly proclaim matters of race because the culture in which the film exists and in which it is exhibited perpetually *sees through race* without bothering to trouble black visuality. Since the culture of looking in which *Symbio* emerges is constantly thinking and talking about race *for* William Greaves, albeit not in the ways he would like, he takes this highly experimental opportunity to find other ways of saying things, other ways of *singing* things.

Take the opening credit sequence. Maria San Filippo has likened the extended opening credit sequence to Dziga Vertov in that editing is used to chronicle the cycles of human reproduction in linear order, from birth to death.³² At the end of this sequence, there is a sound. Clearly, there are sounds throughout the film, but this one stands out. It is a strange, high-pitched tone that gradually increases in volume until it is nearly intolerable. While it is mixed in with the funky jazz of the film’s score and ambient sounds from the park, somehow this sound *feels* different.³³ It seems to be separate from many of the other sounds. It is discernible but inarticulate, eluding easy identification. It is a bit grating. It is persistent. Perhaps it is a noise. Perhaps it should not be there. But this is hard to say: amid the busy, near-cacophony of the diegetic sounds from Central Park, plus the boisterous fusion music of the soundtrack, the source of this potentially unpleasant sound is obscured, just as its propriety within the audible portion of the sensorium is obscured. Do the filmmakers or scoring musicians want this sound there? Is it coming from the many ambient sounds of the park, or from the music, or from some sort of malfunctioning filmmaking equipment, or from some malfunctioning playback equipment with which we, the audience, are watching and listening to *Symbio*? Listening closely, this sound—this squeal or screech—becomes part of the music. It might be from a 1960s-era synthesizer, or a theremin, or electric guitar feedback, or from electrical interference coming

through a speaker; it might be composed and played purposefully, or it might be a malfunction, accidental.

As this sequence winds down, and the music fades along with it, Greaves hears the squeal too, as do other crew members. We realize that he is hearing what we hear. He does not seem to like it (fig. 2). The director asks to hear the sound coming through the headphones that monitor the recording. As he places headphones on his head, he pronounces what he hears “dreadful.” He appears shocked by its unpleasantness. But, things are still somewhat oblique, as so much is in this film. Is Greaves actually hearing what the film’s audience is hearing? Is the squeal we hear coming through his headphones? Is the noise what sounds dreadful to him, or is it something else entirely? Or, perhaps Greaves likes that sound, and it is everything else that he hears that sounds terrible. Does he also hear the jazz music, with which the noise has been so expertly synced on the soundtrack? On the other hand, maybe the director does not hear anything at all, just dead air in the headphones, and that is what is distressing—his deprivation of sound, his lack of hearing. Or, perhaps Greaves is just acting. It is all just acting, in the end, is it not? Of course, *Symbio* is a performance and an improvisation. It comes together as a series of intertwining improvisational interactions coaxed from an eclectic ensemble by a charismatic, if recalcitrant and mysteriously taciturn (band) leader—a man with a rough string of ideas (not a chart or script, just some provocative notes) who lets things roll endlessly, seeing and hearing what occurs, only to try to mix all the noise together into something coherent



Figure 2. Greaves hears the grating, persistent squeal.

later on. But as the squeal moves across scenes from which it likely did not originate, it blends in with the score; it is remixed into the music. This noise seems to be both within and outside of the narrative—it is *transdiegetic*.³⁴ And it forms the very last moment of the film as well—the noise in *Symbio* is alpha and omega, and it is of a piece with the heavily edited improvisations of *In a Silent Way*.

This is some of the blackness of *Symbio*: a blackness that disrupts, that unsettles, that is not settled; a blackness that surprises, that mediates, that criticizes; a blackness that is not determinate but is also not inessential; a blackness that is accented and accentual; a blackness that is troubling but not untroubled; a *noisy blackness that sings*. In singing blackness, *Symbio* implies that traditional methods of talking about blackness have been exhausted. Greaves had attempted to convey his points in a variety of mediums, from film to television to print, before finally concluding in the *Times*—wherein, I reiterate, he identified himself as “Furious Black”—that “100 Madison Avenues” could not help resist white hegemony.³⁵ What was left to say via conventional modes? In this fashion, *Symbio* is a “break” in Fred Moten’s varied sense of the term: a splitting, a cut, a tear, a departure, a solo. And, like all solos, the ride ends, and the soloist steps back into the group; Greaves would never again attempt anything quite so radically experimental, perhaps because so few people could hear the music he was making.

In any case, halfway through the film, amid the diverse chatter of various production units and an intense face-to-face conversation between Greaves and his two lead actors, we hear an offscreen crew member (Jonathan Gordon, the sound engineer) lament, “Ah, there’s no mic on Bill, man! Where’s that mic?” The failure of recording technologies is an insistent trope in the film. As the audible dialogue fades out completely, another sort of hectic conversation, “It’s about That Time,” from *In a Silent Way*, fades in. Talking is supplanted by music. The actors and director are still speaking; however, the dialogue is inaudible—we see this—but we hear it in a silent way. Their lips keep moving, but Miles Davis’s music is doing all the talking (fig. 3). The music becomes the focal point of communication through a ventriloquial substitution. This is but one instance leading to the realization that the film tells us things that it does not necessarily say using words, that it speaks languages of misdirection and singing, voicing ideas about race that transcend the immediate accessibility preferred by a culture dominated by racist scopical regimes. “It’s about That Time” is busy music. To be sure, it is collective, funky improvisation among diverse electronic and acoustic instrumentalists, with a strong bass vamp and very little precomposed before recording, and it “interrupts” the equally busy location-based audio (ambient sounds and dialogue) of the film. Diegetic audio and nondiegetic music quite regularly bleed into each other throughout *Symbio*, with the nearly cacophonous



Figure 3. The actors speak but their dialogue is inaudible due to audio recording failures.

dialogue of the production and the ambient sounds of the park (captured simultaneously by the three mobile audio recording rigs) fading out as the music fades in, and vice versa.

This use of sound reveals the lexical as merely a single source of language among many.³⁶ Polyphony tempting cacophony is thus a founding move of *Symbio*. The uninhibited group improvisational music often comes in just when things seem to be falling apart in the film shoot. The music plays and the noises get louder when speech will no longer suffice. This constant flirtation with dissolution, a collective improvisation that is loosely proctored by a leader with an elastic set of expectations, is very much like jazz. As David P. Brown writes, jazz reflects “the tenuous balance between object and action by which such borders maintain their tentative relations with the forces they organize, and how they are inherently subject to change, capable of resisting closure and objectification by acknowledging and engaging noise.”³⁷ In other words, the apparent disorder of improvisation embraces change and indeterminacy through its assignation with noise, the spontaneous, and the aleatory. While it is important not to fetishize noise nor to grant it utopian powers, the (re)organization of forces against closure and objectification that is the hallmark of improvisatory praxis implies precisely the sort of confounding of normative black visuality that *Symbio* works to achieve.³⁸ Again,

as Greaves makes a film that breaks all the rules, it should not be surprising that blackness will also be deconstructed—not absent, but reconfigured, challenged, and upended. As Moten points out, improvisation is a performative necessity for blackness.³⁹ And, following the epigraph from Mackey at the beginning of this essay, we must recall that improvisation is a divergence from the given that refuses to allow the integral noise of categorization to be suppressed.⁴⁰ In terms of information theory, to remix may be to introduce noise into a system through appropriation and reconfiguration, so to remix from an improvisationally founded counter-archive is doubly, even exponentially, noisy.

Oppositional Performance and Anamnesis

Greaves inserts noise into the production of his film and into the lives and work of his crew in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most visible are his seeming incompetence and directionless leadership, but these foibles and failures all appear to be part of the plan. Greaves here performs the character of a director without a clue, but this is a ruse, as the director is in actuality highly accomplished and technically expert.⁴¹ This stance, and all of the film, reflects what W. T. Lhamon calls “the optic black, or the widespread refusal to fit”; Lhamon contends that “performers who underwrite these propositions [of the optic black] drive the machine inside the machine of American vernacular art. They open spaces in public where an alternative to optic whiteness can do its oppositional work. That work is chiefly the display of a widespread refusal to fit.”⁴² In other words, the unsettling of expectation and the radical refusal to conform are foundational to a certain sort of blackness that has in turn been fundamental to American (and, by turns, global) popular culture.⁴³ Greaves’s oppositional film and his oppositional performance within that film refuse to comply with most expectations, including the expectation that blackness be a facilely conceptualized and overtly proclaimed theme of the production.

So much of the scholarship on this film explores the limits of its reflexivity: whether or not Greaves’s character in the film is genuine, how much was scripted, how much was planned, how much was a happy accident. All of this contributes to contextualization and certainly adds depth to the understanding of a historically important and tragically neglected film, yet I think it misses a crucial point that I have been driving at herein and that Lhamon articulates as well. To wonder who Greaves really is in the film is to simultaneously accept and reject the fundamentally performative character of his character; it is to meet, but then overlook, the performativity of not just Greaves as Greaves but also of blackness itself. If the “optic black” is

the vernacular refusal to fit, then Greaves effects an ambiguous posture in part to confound notions of authorship but also to confound notions of race. Greaves is signifyin', but that does not make blackness absent, just differently directed.⁴⁴ This different direction for blackness is plain to hear (and see) but sometimes gets lost in the mix. In this way, *Symbio* is nothing less than a redirection of the furious kinetic energies of blackness through Greaves's performativity.⁴⁵

The tensions surrounding Greaves's failures as a director come to a head during the aforementioned mutiny scene that is cut up and interspersed throughout the film. The scene is the apotheosis of the political and aesthetic promises and perils of a certain sort of loosely directed improvisation. In the scene, the heterogeneous crew debates the merits and perils of Greaves's leadership and the deceptive possibilities inherent in the potential failure of the film. Some see it as a disaster, some a put-on, but all have something to say. Here in life, as in art, each player longs for a chance to play; each speaker wants to use her voice, which can be a noisy, difficult, but politically essential process. Greaves is the leader, but his players are playing what they feel as they feel it. This is a very jazzy happening—a series of collective improvisational moments where everyone gets a break. In a brief introduction to his exploration of *duende* (following Lorca's monumental "Play and Theory of the *Duende*," from 1933), Nathaniel Mackey sees an opportunity to uncover both musical and poetic aspirations to a speaking beyond the possible in the frustration of voicelessness and the pursuit of a different, augmentary, or metavoice.⁴⁶ Mackey gestures toward "musical practices that achieve rending and dialogic effects and to poetry's cultivation of the bivolality or polyvolality of multiple meaning," extending all the way to "inter-media supplementation, the alternate voice one medium affords another or proffers the model of to another . . . raising questions of translation or translatability and collaboration between media."⁴⁷ This is a signal part of what noise, improvisation, performativity, and jazz do in *Symbio*: provide an augmentary voice that speaks beyond the possible, figuring blackness differently in order to obviate the "commonsensical" notion that blackness is something that can be plainly seen.

The transpositional capacities of noise, the power of jazz, and the free response of spontaneous, improvised group performance are imperative here. When the screeching sound that begins the film appears at the end of *Symbio*, it is yet again mixed with Miles Davis's "It's about That Time." There is still confusion among the crew over the source of the squeal, and the director once again dons the headphones, as he did in the beginning: he wants to *listen* as closely as he can. When the noise dissipates in the beginning of the film, birds are heard chirping in the park. At the end of the film, a siren overlaps the squealing, but unlike at the beginning, the noise does not end until

the film does. Noise is the very last thing we hear, and throughout, sounds are everywhere. Not coincidentally, the last image of the film is a zoom-in to extreme close-up on a freeze frame of the face of black actress Audrey Henningham, who portrays Alice in both films, but much more in *Take 2 1/2* than in *Symbio* (fig. 4). When the striking, squealing noise and the jazz music come together once again, along with the frozen face of Henningham, anamnesis—“the often involuntary revival of memory caused by listening and the evocative power of sounds . . . reconnecting past mental images to present consciousness” is triggered, and the film’s take on blackness finally begins to coalesce.⁴⁸

The combined effect of beginning and end is anamnestic and transpositional: we cannot fully understand the film until its end, after everything has passed, and whereupon earlier enigmas—in particular, the mysterious recurrent noise that bookends the film—make more sense.⁴⁹ All this is to say that where *Symbio* arrives at an enforced remembered connection between a beginning and an end, it does so in a less direct fashion than many audiences expect. Where frantic linear movement through the human lifespan provided images for the jazzy, noisy sounds in the beginning of the film, the stridently frozen image of a black woman’s face is yoked to the noise and then



Figure 4. A close-up of Audrey Henningham, who portrays the character of Alice in *Take 2 1/2* and *Symbio*.

silence (the absence of all soundtrack whatsoever) along with a fade to different kind of black at the end of the film.

In essence, Greaves has provided the keys to deciphering an initially cryptic engagement with blackness by placing an establishing shot as the finale of his film. When this final shot is connected to the jazzy, noisy establishing shots of the credit sequence and the repeated irruptions of noise and jazz throughout the film, Greaves's confounding creation may at last be decrypted. In this way, the film sings its arguments more than it directly signs them, which is why critics so often overlook these points, watching instead for a stentorian announcement of blackness when blackness is being performed right in front of them.⁵⁰ In *Symbio*, the beginning and end and all in between are similarly noisy and spontaneous but are shunted through the filter of the editor's mix, just as is Miles's music. Like existence itself, this is noise of which we endeavor to make sense, both as it occurs immediately and as we recall it later.

In the end, the mysterious and repeated failure of technology in *Symbio* draws attention to the similarly aligned positivistic faith in the ready visual legibility and empirical existence of blackness.⁵¹ Contra such empiricism, blackness brings the noise into systems like racialization that only appear fixed. Each time technology fails in the film, Greaves listens closely and is satisfied. This is because, in many ways, *Symbio* is an extended and intricate allegorical meditation on the perils of looking at race and the possibilities of listening to it and spontaneously riffing upon it. Like blackness, improvisation is not monolithic, uniform, or universalizable. Improvisation, noise, and blackness are formed through diverse sets of culturally, historically, and individually variable practices that move and make meaning in innumerable, yet still specific, ways. But we must listen in order to hear.⁵² When we do listen carefully, we hear that many things sound black, but how black sounds is often surprising.

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focuses on how the mediatic implications of #BlackLivesMatter intersect with Afro-pessimism and black optimism, about which he will be presenting a Close-Up in a forthcoming issue of *Black Camera*.

Notes

1. John Mowitt, *Sounds: The Ambient Humanities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 106.

2. Nathaniel Mackey, "Paracritical Hinge," in *Paracritical Hinge: Essays, Talks, Notes, Interviews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 209.

3. Ajay Heble, *Landing the Wrong Note: Jazz, Dissonance, and Critical Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), xi.

4. James Tobias, *Sync: Stylistics of Hieroglyphic Time* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 149. Jazz, Tobias writes "works as a historical resource extensible across media."

5. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 255n1. Michael B. Gillespie, "Reckless Eyeballing: Coonskin, Film Blackness and the Racial Grotesque," in *Contemporary Black American Cinema: Race, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, ed. Mia Mask (New York: Routledge, 2012), 56. Moten argues that "blackness is always a disruptive surprise moving in the rich non-fullness of every term it modifies . . . [s]uch mediation suspends neither the question of identity nor the question of essence" but is manifested through the "inscriptional events of a set of performances" that insist upon a rethinking of identity and essence. Gillespie argues for the "multi-accentual quality of blackness as critical mediation and practice rather than ontological or biological determinate." These are but a few examples.

6. Greaves's film runs roughly seventy-five minutes; it is composed of heavily edited footage culled from many more hours of raw material and was shot outdoors, during the day, in Central Park (the palace revolt scenes, during which the crew mutinies, were shot indoors). The director intended to produce up to five feature-length takes edited from the original shoot but shelved the project when distribution for the first take proved elusive. I focus only on *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*. A sequel of sorts, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take 2 1/2* (Greaves, 2003) incorporates some of the original unused footage and is included on Criterion's DVD release. Steve Buscemi and Steven Soderbergh supported the new film, while also helping the original achieve renewed attention on the festival circuit in the 1990s. Personally, I do not find *Take 2 1/2* as compelling as *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*.

7. The yoking of visual difference to ideological notions of racial essence may variously be called epidermality (particularly where the visual difference is based on skin color), black visuality, and so on.

8. Paul Arthur, *A Line of Sight: American Avant-Garde Film since 1965* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Franklin Cason Jr. and Tsitsi Jaji, "Symbiopsychotaxiplasticity," *Cultural Studies* 28, no. 4 (2014): 576, Akiva Gottlieb, "Just Another Word for Jazz: The Signifying Auteur in William Greaves's *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*," *Black Camera* 5, no. 1 (2013). Charles Musser and Adam Knee, "William Greaves, Documentary Filmmaking, and the African American Experience," in *Cinemas*

of the *Black Diaspora: Diversity, Dependence, and Oppositionality*, ed. Michael T. Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 389–404. Scholarship on the film tends to place its blackness into two categories—missing or contextual—or some combination thereof. Gottlieb is chief among those who find the film largely empty of black politics or aesthetics (he claims blackness is a “structuring absence” in *Symbio*). Arthur discusses Greaves’s importance to black independent filmmaking. Cason and Jaji, much like Knee and Musser, situate the film in terms of Greaves’s extensive and important oeuvre, which consists principally of film and television productions that overtly address black history and culture. In addition, Cason and Jaji compare *Symbio* and *Take 2 1/2* in an effort to reveal the films’ political engagements within a continuum of Greaves’s work. This latter (contextual) approach may be seen as something of an answer to the question of wherein the film’s blackness exists, if it does so at all. Clearly, I am arguing something rather different: that a complex, conscious, and vital sort of blackness is very much present in *Symbio* itself, even if it appears absent on the surface.

9. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 2, xiv.

10. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing through Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), xii–xiii, emphasis in the original. Mitchell’s thesis is contentious, as he argues for the usefulness of race as a concept following decades of work revealing race as a destructive mythology. He does not renaturalize race, though.

11. The intersections of blackness and sound might be referred to as “black sonicity.”

12. Lindon Barrett, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 216.

13. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 75.

14. Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16–18. Despite the use of visual apparatuses and scopic regimes for the circumscription, definition, and subjugation of black subjects, Fleetwood argues that totalizing vision through equivalence between looking and racial repression is a trap from which black identities cannot escape. As Fleetwood argues, the black body may provide a critical, constructively “troubling presence to the very scopic regimes that define it” as a disquieting figuration.

15. I say that the film begins with noise, but, strictly speaking, that is incorrect. There are roughly four minutes of pre-credit sequences that establish the primary conceit of the film, namely, that it is a melodramatic and heated lovers’ quarrel acted out by several different diverse pairs of actors. Once these scenes from the melodrama are finished, the true heft of the film begins to emerge, as we see the production crews and the director in the process of making a film. Also after these four minutes, the music plays, and the music, as I have said, is crucial.

16. There is a distinct current of homophobia in the scenes that discuss or depict Freddie’s alleged queerness. Both the film’s crew and the characters in *Over the Cliff* call Freddie a “faggot.” Thus, the homophobia occurs within the diegesis of the melodrama and outside it, in the so-called documentary. I suspect this slur was common parlance in the sexual and gender politics of the time, yet, as with everything else in the film, we must recall the tendency to trouble sedimented categories. For example, when Greaves makes a misogynist remark about a woman’s “tits” later in the film, he immediately follows it up with a reflexive turn, breaking the fourth wall and directly addressing the camera: “I’m kidding. Don’t take me seriously.”

17. Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 242.

18. Musically, polyphony describes the simultaneous coexistence of multiple unique melodies within the same musical piece. While the parts often harmonize with one another, each melody is distinct and of roughly equal prominence. In *Symbio*, for example, the screeching noise and the jazz music are musically polyphonic as they co-occur. For Bakhtin, polyphony means the presence of many voices within every individual voice. In other words, Bakhtin shows that every seemingly discrete notion is composed of a multiplicity of other influential notions. This applies to people, ideas, art, and so on. See note 35, below.

19. Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema 3: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 59.

20. Attempting to define jazz is a losing proposition. Indeed, many of its most renowned practitioners have disavowed the word, going so far as to sneer or insult interviewers and critics who dared to label their music with the seemingly innocuous title. Again, Greaves often described the film as a sort of “audiovisual jazz” or “cinematic jazz,” drawing attention both to blackness and to the potential for the unexpected to emerge out of group and individual spontaneity. So, whether a musician plays something she prefers to simply call music, or American classical music (following Baraka), or jazz, or refuses generic classification altogether, it is safe to say that jazz, for both Greaves and many musicians, has a core of improvisation. But, not all improvisational music is jazz. Jazz probably has to *swing*, another term with various denotations, and thus the difficulty.

21. Cason and Jaji, “Symbiopsychotaxiplasticity,” 590. The authors momentarily examine the use of Miles’s music in *Symbio* and make brief mention of the important formal resonances between the film and *In a Silent Way*. They go on to contrast this with Greaves’s use of Ron Carter’s music in *Take 2 1/2*.

22. As I have noted, while the music was played by Davis’s ensemble, the editing for *In a Silent Way* was famously performed by Teo Macero, who would achieve renown and criticism working with Miles in this fashion on a number of classic albums. For *Symbio*, Greaves was the primary force in the editing room, but the raw material was provided by the cast, crew, public, and so on.

23. James F. Ward, *Language, Form, and Inquiry: Arthur F. Bentley’s Philosophy of Social Science* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 110.

24. MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine*, 244.

25. Nathaniel Mackey, “Introduction: Door Peep (Shall Not Enter)” in *Paracritical Hinge*, 8–9.

26. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, England: Minor Compositions, 2013), 50. As Moten and Harney argue, improvisation is “something not but almost nothing other than the spontaneous.”

27. Following my argument through, I want to reiterate the resonances among blackness, jazz, noise, and improvisation. These relationships are not simply a matter of historical origination and artistic accreditation—not simply jazz as reduced to blackness, nor vice versa. On the contrary, I am proposing that *Symbio* readily engages the same forces, perils, and potentials as the improvising jazz ensemble. Again, jazz is adept at creating new relations through improvisation, collective listening, and coextension. Such relations are not necessarily harmonious, though. Jazz may be dissonant, chaotic, noisy, and diffuse—often desirously so—and the potential for disruption, variability, and ingenuity exists wherever groups of people spontaneously create anything.

In other words, jazz and improvisation abet the potential blackness of everyday life, and this is a blackness that is mobile and available for reappropriation and remixing. Once more, this leads to a consideration of blackness itself as a disruptive, noisy, performative, relational, and critical intervention rather than a sociological determinant or a priori visual certainty.

28. As delineated above, Gottlieb (“Just Another Word for Jazz”) and Cason/Jaji (“Symbiopsychotaxiplasticity”) have published most recently on the film. Gottlieb considers blackness a “structuring absence” in *Symbio*, and he addresses the contextual significance of black directorial control in a white industry during a period of pronounced racial and political unrest. Cason and Jaji find Greaves’s *Symbio* films (the first and its sequel) to be of a piece with his more overt, politically engaged works, although they also see blackness, excepting the jazz influence, as largely outside *Symbio*’s purview. Part of what I am arguing is that the jazziness of the film and its score/soundtrack, far from being merely referential, are explicit and foundational engagements with blackness.

29. William Greaves, “100 Madison Avenues Will Be of No Help,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1970. So far as I know, Gottlieb is responsible for bringing this article into the critical discourse, which is a great service to scholarship on Greaves and the film.

30. David Ake, *Jazz Matters: Sound, Place, and Time since Bebop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 37–53. Ted Gioia, *The Imperfect Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 56.

31. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90. Fanon unpacks the connections between ontology and skin color throughout chapter five of the book. See, most famously, Fanon’s incident on the train with the white French child: “The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.”

32. Maria San Filippo, “What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been: *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*,” *Film History* 13, no. 2 (2001): 216–25.

33. In scholarship on the film, this particular opening credit music is almost always referred to as part of Miles Davis’s *In a Silent Way*. I strongly suspect it is not Miles Davis, and it is definitely not part of that particular album. I cannot locate the track on any re-released version, including the *Complete In a Silent Way*, which includes hours of alternate takes. Other superb musicians—including Miles’s keyboard player, Joe Zawinul, who also composed the track “In a Silent Way”—contributed music to the soundtrack. I believe this track comes from one of those artists, not Davis, which is why I do not identify it.

34. Transdiegesis refers to sounds or other elements that are both within the fictional world of the film and outside of it, or that seem to extend through different incongruous parts of a film’s fictional world. Film scores are principally extradiegetic in that they exist for the audience but not for the film’s characters. There are exceptions—transdiegetic elements—and such exceptions are often imbued with complex and weighty, if not ambiguous, significations.

35. Greaves, “100 Madison Avenues Will Be of No Help.”

36. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). This is polyphony and heteroglossia, two key Bakhtinian concepts. Polyphony (many voices) refers to the idea that each individual “voice” (a

subjectivity, concept, artwork, etc.) actually contains the influences of many other voices. Heteroglossia—literally, “the speech of the other”—is closely connected. Dialogism, a third interrelated Bakhtinian concept, indicates the import of all voices through time as they “speak” to each other across past, present, and future.

37. David P. Brown, *Noise, Improvisation, Architecture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxvi.

38. Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang & Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 22. Schwartz provides a helpful cautionary note against either overtly dystopian or excessively utopian conceptions of noise: “common are polemics urging us either to act against a mounting cacophony or to applaud noise as ground and guidepost to political, artistic, or cultural transfiguration. Aroused by the peals of resurgent environmentalism or the quavers of postmodernism, such polemics quickly shift from an ill-defined past to an unrefined present.”

39. Fred Moten, “The Subprime and the Beautiful” *African Identities* 11, no. 2 (2013), 239. “Preservation [of blackness/black life] is . . . improvisation,” Moten tells us.

40. Mackey, “Paracritical Hinge,” 209.

41. The repeated failure of sound technology is all the more unlikely given the contextual fact that Greaves worked as a professional sound recordist on dozens of film and television productions.

42. W. T. Lhamon Jr., “Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit,” in *Black Cultural Traffic*, ed. Harry J. Elam Jr. and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 112.

43. Significantly, one need not actually be black to effect the optic black. Although Lhamon does not mention him, think Eminem, for instance.

44. Gottlieb discusses Greaves’s use of signifyin’ practices but leaves the blackness of said practices largely unexamined.

45. Put differently, “Furious Black” is still furious, he is simply no longer screaming.

46. Mackey, “Introduction: Door Peep,” 13–14.

47. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

48. Jean-Francois Augoyard and Henry Torgue, eds., *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds*, trans. Andra McCartney and David Paquette (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 21.

49. The use of sonic anamnesis as alpha and omega in a film is rare, but not unprecedented. In the film *Vidas secas / Barren Lives* (dir. Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), for example, the screeching noise that begins and ends the film reoccurs several times throughout, sometimes non-diegetically. (The film is based on Garciliano Ramos’s groundbreaking novel of the same name, from 1938.) Eventually, the diegesis reveals to the audience that the screech emanates from a barely functioning wagon wheel used by the destitute family of laborers who eke out a bare existence in the arid Brazilian sertão. This revelation triggers anamnesis, attaching the noise of the wheel to both the remembered sound heard earlier and the images of the hobbled cart. Further, this noise is now also attached to the *idea* of the exploitation of the *lumpenproletariat* and their starkly barren lives (“vidas” means lives, and “secas” means dry or barren in Portuguese) in the desolate Brazilian backlands. *Vidas secas* and *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* are interesting when thought together due to their common affinities, most particularly their shared connections to the production practices of neorealism and cinema vérité. An obvious point of departure lies in editing; *Vidas secas*, like Cinema Novo more broadly, tends to

minimize editing and emphasize long takes. Greaves, inspired by Eisenteinian montage, obviously used editing to the fullest.

50. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). There is a sense in which musical semiotics has something to say here, but concerns of space and focus prevent me from pursuing this angle. There are a number of interesting texts on musical semiotics, many of which take fairly divergent approaches to their formulations of semiosis. I find these three of particular note. Nattiez is the “godfather” of musical semiotics.

51. Essentially, the film is focalized through an “aesthetics of imperfection,” or even an “aesthetics of failure,” but not failure in the colloquial or vernacular sense. This is an imperfection as celebrated by jazz (Gioia, Ake) and a failure as understood by noise (Hegarty) and through the lens of what Jack Halberstam calls “the queer art of failure.” As technologies fail to “capture” the complex realities of human interactions and relationships; as political and dialogical encounters fail to arrive at concrete, lasting solutions; as heteronormative marriage fails to become the apotheosis of romantic and sexual partnerships; as a director and his cast and crew fail to make a “real” movie; as sound recordings fail into noise; as celluloid runs out, and surveillance fails in its aspirations toward ubiquitous capture; as auteurism, that typically reliable interpretive grid, fails as a hermeneutic, if not in practice; as cinematic distribution networks tragically, yet reliably, fail; then radical possibilities emerge. If *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* fails, it fails up, as the saying goes. If *Take One* is difficult to categorize, cacophonous, strange, singular, oppositional, and provides no “easy answers,” that is precisely as it should be. It fails because it must fail in order to succeed.

52. R. Murray Shafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993). As usual, some terminological clarification is in order. The most important distinction is perhaps between “hearing” and “listening.” R. Murray Shafer popularized this distinction within sound studies in his work *The Soundscape*, but it has been made many times, by many others. Hearing means using one’s auditory sense; it is a function of perception by which our ears receive a sound and send it to the brain. Listening means to use one’s auditory senses carefully, to concentrate in order to hear something vigilantly, perhaps with an added level of understanding.